

Message Text

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PAGE 01 KINGST 03734 061624Z

53

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EB-07

OMB-01 TRSE-00 /065 W

----- 001050

R 061500Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2276

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY NASSAU

AMEMBASSY PORT

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 3734

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, JM

SUBJECT: JAMAICA: THE NEXT CARIBBEAN REPUBLIC?

1. THE EMBASSY RECENTLY RECEIVED AN INFORMAL INQUIRY FROM THE DEPARTMENT ON THE LIKELIHOOD OF JAMAICA BECOMING A REPUBLIC, AND ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF SUCH STATUS IN SEVERAL AREAS.

2. PM MANLEY ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS HERE AND ABROAD HAS PUBLICLY SPOKEN OF HIS PREFERENCE FOR REPUBLIC STATUS WITHIN THE COMMONWEALTH; MOST KEY POLITICAL LEADERS IN BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION (INCLUDING SEAGA) SHARE THIS PREFERENCE

. THE PRINCIPLE IS NOT A POLITICAL ISSUE--TO THE CONTRARY, THERE APPEARS TO BE WIDESPREAD POPULAR SENTIMENT (BUT NOT PRESSURE) FOR MOVEMENT IN THIS DIRECTION.

3. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, DIFFERING POINTS OF VIEW (MAINLY AMONG LAWYERS) AS TO WHETHER JAMAICA SHOULD RETAIN APPEAL ACCESS TO THE PRIVY COUNCIL (AS HAS TRINIDAD).

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 KINGST 03734 061624Z

4. THE ABSENCE OF ANY CURRENT MOVEMENT TOWARD REPUBLIC

STATUS CAN BE ATTRIBUTED AT THIS TIME TO THE MANLEY GOVERNMENT'S (AND THE OPPOSITION'S) PREOCCUPATION WITH JAMAICA'S DOMESTIC POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. MOREOVER, THERE IS PRESENTLY A DIRECT LINK OF THE REPUBLIC STATUS ISSUE WITH AN ONGOING BUT SLOW PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW. THE LATTER HAS NOT BEEN VERY ACTIVE IN RECENT MONTHS, BUT THE QUESTIONS UNDER EXAMINATION INCLUDE: (A) WHETHER THE WESTMINSTER SYSTEM WILL BE CONTINUED; (B) (IF JAMAICA SHOULD BECOME A REPUBLIC) WHETHER THE HEAD OF STATE AND HEAD OF GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS WOULD BE COMBINED OR REMAIN SEPARATE -- AND (IF THE LATTER) WHETHER THE HEAD OF STATE WILL REMAIN A LARGELY CEREMONIAL OFFICE.

5. SEVERAL EVENTS COULD TRIGGER MORE RAPID MOVEMENT TO REPUBLIC STATUS. SHOULD THE ONGOING SUIT BY REVERE AGAINST THE JAMAICAN GOVERNMENT CONCERNING ALLEGED EXPROPRIATION OF REVERE JAMAICA REACH A POINT WHERE APPEAL TO THE PRIVY COUNCIL SEEMS LIKELY, THE GOJ MIGHT SEEK TO FORESTALL THAT ACTION THROUGH RAPID MOVEMENT TO REPUBLIC STATUS AND LEAVE TO LATER OTHER AND MORE DOMESTIC CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES. SUCH A MOVE TO REPUBLIC STATUS WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE ACCOMPANIED BY A SEVERANCE OF THE LINK TO THE PRIVY COUNCIL.

6. ANOTHER SCENARIO IS MORE POLITICAL. WHATEVER PARTY IS ELECTED TO OFFICE FOLLOWING THE GENERAL ELECTIONS EARLY NEXT YEAR, THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE A POLITICAL NEED TO TAKE A SERIES OF NEW AND POPULAR INITIATIVES. GIVEN THE FINANCIAL RESTRAINTS ON EITHER A RETURNED MANLEY GOVERNMENT OR A NEW SEAGA GOVERNMENT, REPUBLIC STATUS WOULD BE AN ATTRACTIVE OPTION; IT WOULD COST LITTLE OR NOTHING.

7. THE LEGAL STEPS TO REPUBLIC STATUS CAN BE EITHER SIMPLE OR COMPLEX. IF THE SHIFT TO REPUBLIC STATUS IS NOT ACCOMPANIED BY OTHER RADICAL CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES, MOST LAWYERS HERE BELIEVE IT COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED BY A TWO-THIRDS VOTE OF BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT. SINCE BOTH THE OPPOSITION AND THE GOVERNMENT SUPPORT THE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 KINGST 03734 061624Z

CHANGE TO REPUBLIC STATUS THERE SHOULD BE NO PROBLEM. HOWEVER, GOOD POLITICS WOULD PROBABLY ARGUE FOR THERE ALSO TO BE A POPULAR REFERENDUM. IF THE SHIFT IS ACCOMPLISHED BY BASIC CONSTITUTIONAL DOMESTIC CHANGES HERE (E.G. A SHIFT TO A PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM) THEN THERE WILL BE A MANDATORY REQUIREMENT FOR A REFERENDUM IN ADDITION TO PARLIAMENTARY ACTION.

8. WHENEVER THE SHIFT TO REPUBLIC STATUS TAKES PLACE, WE SEE NO BASIC CHANGES IN JAMAICA'S OTHER RELATIONSHIPS TO THE U.S. AS AN EXAMPLE, RESIDUAL DEFENSE LINKS PROBABLY WOULD CONTINUE, AS WOULD JAMAICA'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMONWEALTH AND ITS SUBSIDIARY BODIES.

9. INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, A SHIFT TO REPUBLIC STATUS MIGHT IN SOME RESPECTS STRENGTHEN CARIBBEAN REGIONALISM. MANY THOUGHTFUL JAMAICAN LEADERS, INCLUDING MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, BELIEVE IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO HAVE AN ULTIMATE COURT OF APEAL OUTSIDE OF JAMAICA IN LIEU OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL. ONE ALTERNATIVE OFTEN DISCUSSED IS A REGIONAL SUPREME COURT WHICH WOULD SERVICE ALL CARIBBEAN MEMBERS OF THE COMMONWEALTH.
GERARD

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, FORM OF GOVERNMENT, SELFDETERMINATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976KINGST03734
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760337-0408
From: KINGSTON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760988/aaaacxkx.tel
Line Count: 131
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <07 JUL 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <08 JUL 2004 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: JAMAICA: THE NEXT CARIBBEAN REPUBLIC?
TAGS: PGOV, JM
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006